

*An  
Evaluation  
of the*

**State of the Church  
Conference  
and the  
Documentation**

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
LIBRARY  
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

**An Interview with L. B. Meyer**

8892



July 14, 1961

To All Pastors and Teachers of Synod:

Dear Brethren and Co-workers:

You are herewith receiving an evaluation of the State of the Church Conference and the documentation submitted to the participants at the time of the meeting and sent to most of our pastors in *News and Views*.

Two of Synod's Vice-Presidents, Dr. Roland Wiederaenders and Dr. Arthur Nitz, attended all the meetings as visitors. Dr. L. B. Meyer attended all meetings as an unofficial observer and press representative.

Dr. Meyer has carefully studied all the documents and has checked with Dr. Wiederaenders and Dr. Nitz the factualness of the data relating to the Conference and the documentation contained in the evaluation.

We believe that Dr. Meyer, who has served Synod since 1926 in various official capacities, is well qualified to evaluate the *status quo* of our church.

Please read and study this evaluation carefully and prayerfully. God grant that it may serve a truly God-pleasing purpose in these times.

Yours in Christ,

J. W. BEHNKEN, *President*

*An Evaluation*  
*of the*  
**STATE OF THE CHURCH CONFERENCE**  
*and the*  
**DOCUMENTATION**

*An Interview with L. B. Meyer*

**1. QUESTION: What was the purpose of the State of the Church Conference held in Milwaukee, Wis., in June, 1961?**

ANSWER: According to the letter of invitation, dated April 10, this conference was called for the purpose of presenting facts relative to alleged defections in our Missouri Synod and to determine, under God, what can and must be done to preserve purity of doctrine throughout Synod. The letter also expressed a desire to strengthen Synod by means of this conference.

**2. QUESTION: Are these valid purposes for such a conference?**

ANSWER: Yes, they are. Our Missouri Synod has consistently been blessed with dedicated and concerned members who are vitally interested in doctrine and in maintaining the purity of doctrine throughout Synod. We should all be thankful for such an attitude. This constant concern and watchfulness is one of the real strengths of our church.

**3. QUESTION: Is there anything objectionable in calling a free conference?**

ANSWER: No, there is not. In fact, the mutual sharing of concerns and seeking guidance, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is a part of our Christian freedom, our Christian responsibility, and our Lutheran heritage. This would also apply to anyone who wishes to attend such a free conference. However, the opportunities provided by the regular channels of our "Winkel," circuit, and District conferences should be utilized to the fullest before thought is given to promoting large-scale free conferences.

**4. QUESTION: Did the program of the Milwaukee conference conform to the purposes of the conference stated in the invitation?**

ANSWER: Yes and No. There was conformity to the purpose and program sent out in advance insofar as some of the essays treated some of the doctrinal concerns of our church and also insofar as an effort was made toward preserving purity of doctrine within the church. There was nonconformity, however, in that much time was devoted to matters which were not directly relevant to the purposes of the conference as stated in the invitational letter. I refer to such matters as personal attacks on individuals who had no opportunity to reply, a highly subjective and emotional evaluation of Bible translations, and a long

dissertation on communism. In some of these essays, direct and indirect general charges of communist infiltration of the churches were made. We might all remember a recent statement by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover: "The overwhelming majority of our clergymen are today totally loyal to our nation. This is not the time for name-calling, for unfounded accusations or publicity-seeking charges designed to confuse, divide, and weaken. Because communists know the churches stand as powerful obstacles in the path of their revolution, violent attacks against the church and clergy are made by the Reds." It is not clear to us just why the topics of communism and Bible translations were placed into the program of the conference.

**5. QUESTION:** *How would you express the concerns, doubts, and misgivings toward which some of the other conference essays were directed?*

ANSWER: There were probably three main concerns. One was the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. This one centered primarily on the papers, essays, and lectures delivered by Dr. Martin Scharlemann in the last few years; the second, the two seminary faculties' statement titled *The Theology of Fellowship*; the third was the St. Louis seminary faculty's *A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures*.

**6. QUESTION:** *What is the concern about Dr. Scharlemann, his papers, essays, and lectures?*

ANSWER: Apparently there is a feeling that Dr. Scharlemann in his papers, essays, and lectures no longer adheres to the doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture as officially taught in the Missouri Synod.

**7. QUESTION:** *Is this concern shared by many?*

ANSWER: YES, it would seem that there is a widespread questioning, and uncertainty, confusion, bewilderment, and perplexity of mind and soul on the part of many of our pastors and laity in regard to Dr. Martin Scharlemann's theology of the Word. There are some who even go so far as to brand him a heretic. I do not believe that such a judgment is based on an actual study of all his statements made in the past two or three years. Some of his "exploratory" premises and conclusions made months ago have been modified. Others have been superseded by later statements. — The problem is that comparatively few people in our whole Synod have a running account

of how this controversy originated, its development, or its *status quo*. Many who have read *News and Views* and other publications but know little about the matter as a whole, come to the conclusion that where there is so much smoke, there must be some fire.

**8. QUESTION: What is the actual status quo?**

ANSWER: I have been informed by the President of Synod that the Board of Control, and the *Praesidium* do not consider the matter closed. The faculty of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) is continuing to study the doctrinal implications involved.

Dr. Martin Scharlemann has made the following statement with reference to the term "inerrancy":

"I cannot express my own concern for the use of the word 'inerrancy' in any better way than by quoting the statement devised by our Australian brethren; to wit:

This inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures cannot be seen with human eyes, nor can it be proved to human reason; it is an article of faith, a belief in something that is hidden and not obvious. We believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore inerrant. The term inerrancy has no reference to the variant readings found in the textual sources because of copyists' errors or deliberate alterations; neither does it imply an absolute verbal accuracy in quotations and in parallel accounts, such absolute conformity evidently not having been part of God's design. We believe that the holy writers, whom God used, retained the distinctive features of their personalities (language and terminology, literary methods, conditions of life, knowledge of nature and history as apart from direct revelation and prophecy). God made use of them in such a manner that even that which human reason might call a deficiency in Holy Scripture must serve the divine purpose.

Then, too, there was a further attempt to clarify the issue in the article by Dr. Scharlemann in the April 1961 issue of the *C. T. M.*, written at the request of the Board of Control of Concordia Seminary.

**9. QUESTION: Will, in your opinion, the above statements satisfy the questioning, allay the fears, and remove the tense concern on the part of all?**

ANSWER: I fear they will not. At almost every District convention, members of the *Praesidium* are being importuned for more clarification of Dr. Scharlemann's entire theological position. Even now further plans are under way to arrive at a solution which will be pleasing to God and redound to a greater unity of doctrine in our beloved Synod. You will receive further reports on this as soon as possible.

**10. QUESTION: Getting back to our original discussion of the State of the Church Conference, you said the second major concern was with the seminary faculties' *The Theology of Fellowship*.**

ANSWER: Yes. The State of the Church Conference passed a resolution strongly opposing this statement. It should be pointed out that this statement is the result of an assignment given to the seminary faculties by the 1956 convention of Synod. The faculties were to prepare a paper on this subject for study, and this they have done. Our Doctrinal Unity Committee has also approved the statement. As it presently stands, this statement has *no official status* as a doctrinal statement of our church. It has been distributed for study purposes, as is the usual procedure, and will be acted upon by the 1962 synodical convention at Cleveland.

While we recognize that the program of the State of the Church Conference was crowded, we nevertheless feel that an important statement such as *The Theology of Fellowship*, prepared by a faculty committee over a period of several years and after many hours of joint meetings accepted by both the Springfield and the St. Louis faculties, deserves more consideration, prayerful study, and deliberation than this conference as a group gave to it before passing judgment on the theological correctness of the statement in the light of Scripture. The negative resolution of the State of the Church Conference was prepared by a floor committee and passed by the conference participants without prior group discussion and study. Only the presentation of one paper — a negative one — preceded the vote to oppose *The Theology of Fellowship*.

**11. QUESTION: What about the faculty paper *A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures*?**

ANSWER: This, too, is a study paper intended for just that purpose — study. However, here, too, some of the participants in the State of the Church Conference quickly passed an opposing resolution without prior study and deliberation as a group. Many of those who voted had never even read the paper.

**12. QUESTION:** *What about other topics presented at the free conference, such as the LWF, the NLC, the NCC, and the WCC?*

ANSWER: First of all, the resolution of this conference clearly implies that our Synod has with these groups a relationship "involving worship or joint religious work." (Quoted from Resolution 7 of the conference.) No such relationship exists. While some of our synodical departments have, on an informal, guest-observer basis, attended meetings of these organizations, only one board (Board for Home Missions) carries a formal written, consultative membership in a department of the NCC. This relationship does not have the approval of the *Praesidium* or Synod's Board of Directors. In fact, it is presently under review by both the *Praesidium* and the Board of Directors.

**13. QUESTION:** *The June 1961 issue of News and Views was promoted at the State of the Church Conference and also mailed to most Missouri Synod pastors. What is this publication?*

ANSWER: *News and Views* is a publication of The Church League of America. According to its pamphlet *What Is the Church League of America?* this league was organized on March 24, 1937, by laymen and pastors of various Protestant bodies to combat communism, the trend toward national socialism, left-wing activities in the churches, and the like.

*News and Views* is described as a monthly documented bulletin "dealing with some current phase of subversive activity in the church and educational fields" (p. 6).

**14. QUESTION:** *This publication directly criticized some of the articles that have appeared in the Seminarian and in one of Valparaiso University's student magazines. What reply would you make to this criticism?*

ANSWER: There is no finding fault with some of the criticism. At the same time, it must be remembered that these are student publications. Among other things, these publications are intended to give the students an opportunity to express themselves. The articles in some instances deserved the criticism voiced, and no one regrets their appearance more than those responsible for these magazines.



**15. QUESTION:** *Speaking of Valparaiso University, News and Views charges certain members of the faculty with doctrinal aberrations. What is being done about this situation?*

**ANSWER:** For some time the officials of our Synod have been looking into these matters. I have full confidence in the leadership of the department of religion at Valparaiso. It is not fair to charge the whole university on the basis of statements made by a few individuals.

**16. QUESTION:** *In this connection and in others, the Praesidium of Synod has been charged with being negligent in exercising proper discipline. Is this true?*

**ANSWER:** May I become a bit personal. — To me it has been a glorious privilege to work intimately with the lay and clergy leaders of our church for thirty-five years. From the depth of my soul I thank God for the leaders which He gave to Israel (Judges 5:2). Through the years, they have been gifts of God to our Synod. If I were to mention by name those who have gone to their reward, it would become a miniature roster like unto Hebrews 11. I learned to love, know, honor, and esteem them for their dedication to God and His church. But I also know that they were the first to kneel at night and pray, "Forgive us our trespasses." They were aware of their weaknesses. They made mistakes in administration and judgment. But they were men of integrity. They said what had to be said and made decisions without fear or favor. And I believe with all my heart that God has, through your delegates at conventions assembled, given this generation the same God-fearing, fearless, and dedicated leadership.

No one not intimately connected with the *Praesidium*, both in the past and the present, has full knowledge of the hundreds of hours that have been spent by these men over the years in adjudicating doctrinal matters of all sorts in an evangelical way. There are, of course, times when their efforts are more openly successful than at other times. But as a rule, evangelical dealing, if properly carried out, does not attract much attention. Any parish pastor knows from his own experience that remedial and corrective work with people is frequently slow and cannot always be publicized. Even the positive results do not always attract widespread attention — nor should they necessarily. It is the lot of the *Praesidium*, in view of its responsibility, always to be open to criticism and charges of neglect. And as any

parish pastor also knows, it is frequently difficult to defend oneself publicly against such charges without running the risk of nullifying that which has been accomplished and upsetting matters currently being handled.

**17. QUESTION: *Is the clergy of the Missouri Synod always as well-informed on Synodical matters as it might be?***

ANSWER: This is, of course, a very difficult question to answer because it involves two possibly different points of view on information to be passed out on a given question — the point of view of those in the parish that are interested in the question and the point of view of those who must deal with the question. However, this much can and ought to be said. In general, our internal lines of communication are not as open as they might be. The *Praesidium* is presently working toward an ongoing program of disseminating information that will greatly strengthen the lines of communication within our church.

**18. QUESTION: *The June 1961 issue of News and Views carried a vast array of charges and claims. What is your reply to these charges and claims?***

ANSWER: That issue contained many direct accusations, indirect accusations, and innuendoes. It must be read carefully, or the reader will come to the false conclusion that all of the “evidence” is conclusive and irrefutable. Such is simply not the case.

For example, Dr. Scharlemann is *directly accused* of “undermining the very foundation of the Christian faith” (p. 2, bottom of second column). The “evidence” for this accusation is a reference to a list of books by non-Lutheran writers!

In another instance, Prof. Reimann of our seminary in St. Louis is *indirectly accused* with these words: “Reimann claims Read’s chapter on the Trinity is ‘outstanding,’ and yet Read attacks the historic doctrine of the Trinity and espouses modal monarchianism,” (p. 11). Notice that the authors do not directly say that Read “attacks the historic doctrine of the Trinity” *in the particular chapter of which Prof. Reimann was speaking*. Nor do the authors of this issue of *News and Views* directly accuse Prof. Reimann of personally espousing modal monarchianism. But the implication is so strongly made that the reader can hardly miss it.

Further, *innuendo* is employed by the authors of this issue. “One wonders whether Marty accepts the physical resurrection of

Christ as an event which happened in 'our ordinary calendar history' so that anyone, believer or unbeliever, would have seen an empty tomb that first Easter morning" (p. 19). Here the authors carefully plant the seed of doubt in the reader's mind, but they do not specifically make an accusation, either directly or indirectly.

*Guilt-by-association* also occurs frequently. "Arthur Piepkorn has favorably reviewed the volumes of such extreme modernists as Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Amos Wilder, and John Bonnell" (p. 11). The authors of this issue of *News and Views* do not directly take issue with any specifics of the reviews or of the books under review. Whether the book in review was theologically faulty or not cannot be told from the authors' statement. The point is that the authors link the name of a Concordia Seminary professor with the names of "such extreme modernists." The authors choose to give these men a label that is odious in Missouri Synod circles and then link the name of a Missouri Synod man to those of "modernists," with the direct implication of guilt-by-association.

This issue frequently quotes others in attacks on synodical officials and professors. The evidence is lacking. But the authors have avoided committing themselves by the devious device of quoting others without comment and allowing them to make the accusations.

This type of reporting is a most questionable form of journalism! All in all, this entire issue of *News and Views* points toward inciting general dissatisfaction with theological and administrative leaders of the Missouri Synod. But it is absolutely lacking in providing constructive leadership itself. *And something constructive is the least that could be expected insofar as the editor of News and Views has stated that this issue was not written by anyone in the headquarters of the Church League of America, but "it was written by five pastors and scholars of the Missouri Synod."*

**19. QUESTION:** *Getting back to the State of the Church Conference, what is your over-all feeling about this conference?*

**ANSWER:** Free conferences can be very valuable, even though they are no substitute for our regularly constituted conferences. However, if free conferences are improperly handled, they can be very dangerous to everyone. Perhaps this particular con-

ference can best be summed up in the words of a member of the conference's Invitational Committee. This pastor sent Dr. Behnken a carbon of a letter he addressed to the chairman of the conference. It reads in part:

First of all I want to record my reaction that the State of the Church Conference gave me pleasure and hope and that it is my prayerful longing that this meeting will contribute very substantially, under God, to save our dear Synod. This sentence is the burden of this letter.

It was the definite understanding of the undersigned that this was to be a conference of concerned individuals who would consider our plight in a calm manner and would avoid even the slightest tinge of fanaticism. This assurance was not kept. . . .

The conference ended badly. The permitted applause, the restraint necessarily put on the discussion following the essays, led to explosion of uncontrolled and unthinking enthusiasm, which left little room for calm deliberation.

These are some of the things that cause me to have fear in regard to the effectiveness of the conference. I hope the self-inflicted wounds are not fatal. I had been assured that these things would NOT happen.

I was very pleased that earnest synodical observers were present and that they gave the conference their undivided attention. We should have made a better impression. I am sure we would have done so.

May God bless you and your committee with strength courage, wisdom, and a right judgment in all things.

(The writer of the Evaluation has the permission of the author of the letter addressed to the permanent chairman of the State of the Church Conference to use the above quotations.)

**20. QUESTION:** *Do you think the leaders of this conference intentionally set out to promote fanaticism and dissension?*

ANSWER: There is no reason to believe that this was so. Even today there is no good reason for questioning the integrity or concern of those pastors and laymen who called or attended the conference for the welfare of our church. This must definitely be understood by all. But some of the particular *methods* used for promoting the welfare of our church are definitely open to question.

**21. QUESTION:** Another question. Are you endeavoring to ignore and brush aside almost everything cited in the book of documentation and in News and Views? Is everything really "all well" doctrinally in the Missouri Synod?

**ANSWER:** I shall try to give you a straightforward answer. There are probably no two people in our whole Missouri Synod who would give you exactly the same answer. It is my conviction that there never has been an era in the Missouri Synod in which there was a greater unity of doctrine based on divinely created personal conviction than today. This does not mean that there is not a tendency to move to the left and to the right. Neither of these tendencies has its origin in a breaking away from the moorings of *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia*. Pray God that it will always remain thus.

We should not be surprised that doctrinal aberrations do rear their heads in our church. God has been good to us in that there are not more. There is a difference between doctrinal aberrations and heresy. Heresy is the persistent adherence to false doctrine. This can destroy the soul. Aberrations — and we all have them at one time or another — are part of our imperfect sanctification. I know of no one in our Missouri Synod today of whom I would have to say that he or she is persistently teaching false doctrine. But I am concerned about aberrations both to the left and to the right. Some of these could become divisive if persisted in to their logical conclusion.

I want to make it very clear that many of our laity and our pastors and especially our leaders are fully aware of the situation as it confronts the church today in matters of doctrine and practice. They mutually share the deep concern not only of those on the right and on the left but also of the overwhelming majority in the center.

**22. QUESTION:** What should be done about the current aberrations?

**ANSWER:** We must face our present problems. To sweep them under the rug could become very disastrous.

**23. QUESTION:** What is the cause and the source of some of our doctrinal disturbances?

**ANSWER:** They are caused by various factors. One of these, it seems to me, is that there are theologians in our church who use a terminology which is new and unfamiliar to the rank and

file not only of our laity but also of our clergy. Let me cite an example. Recently I attended a meeting in which one of our theologians used the expression "theology moves." One of our top leaders of Synod immediately took umbrage, stating that "Theology does not move but is constant." The theologian then clarified his expression by stating that theology and doctrine are not synonymous terms. He agreed that doctrine is ever the same, but that theology is the exegesis and the application of doctrine. The difference was one of semantics. This illustrates the point I am trying to make. Many times we talk past each other because we do not understand the same words in the same way. I earnestly urge our theologians to be more intent on making sure that the language they use is understood by the people to whom they are talking. Sometimes the lack of specifically defined language has contributed to the problems of our church today. Such misunderstandings help to create leftist and rightist groups.

Then, too, I should like to ask whether or not there have developed symptoms of intellectualism alongside of traditionalism, and neo-orthodoxy alongside of fundamentalism in our church. I am not making this an accusation or an actual source of some of our troubles, but merely putting it in the form of a question.

However, something that is much more important even than these veerings to the right and to the left is the lack of loving solicitude which should be manifested on both sides — the smearing of personalities, putting the worst construction on individual actions or statements, violent outbursts of temper, mudslinging, refusal to meet as brethren to adjudicate differences unless certain conditions are fulfilled, unethical procedures in compiling so-called evidence, accusations made anonymously, passing judgment without knowing all the facts — these things, brethren, ought not to be.

To come back to your original question: Is all well in the Missouri Synod? No, it is not. But, thank God, it is not as bad as some would make it out to be. The great bulk of the Missouri Synod stands foursquare upon the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Our laity and clergy are becoming impatient. They plead: "Don't distract us with your misconceived intellectualism, your quasi neo-orthodoxy, your gestapo belligerency, your inquisitorial persecution methods. These have no place in the Kingdom. Don't deter us from preaching the Gospel of the crucified

and risen Savior in such a time as this." We must work the works of Christ who sent us while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.

**24. QUESTION: What counsel and advice might be kept in mind by all of us?**

**ANSWER:** Ours is a growing church in a rapidly changing world. Situations that our forefathers never conceived of are facing us every day and demanding a response or an answer. We must always earnestly "contend for the faith," but we dare never become contentious. Where God speaks to us in His Word, the path is clear and we must not deviate from it.

All of us ought constantly to be mindful of our own personal sinfulness, our failings, and our shortcomings. We ought all constantly to pray that God would through His Holy Spirit guide each and all of us in the way that He would have us go. We strive, but we never fully attain. May God keep us and our church. Perhaps the best bit of counsel that can be given to members and to a church is that we remember to let God be God for us and in us and through us. Our lives and our work and our study must always be in terms of the petition we all so often pray, "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."



Jude 20-25

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference. And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Additional copies available on a limited basis  
from:

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD  
210 North Broadway  
St. Louis 2, Missouri

*Concordia Publishing House*

Printed in U. S. A.